



November 7, 2017

Dear Veterinary Colleague,

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) requests your assistance in preventing secondary exposure of scavenging wildlife to the veterinary euthanasia drug sodium pentobarbital. Recently, several turkey vultures were poisoned by sodium pentobarbital in the Simi Valley area of Ventura County. The source of the sodium pentobarbital remains unknown, but ingestion of tissue from chemically-euthanized animals is suspected. Turkey vultures are protected by the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act and California Fish and Game Code. Chemically-euthanized carcasses also pose a danger to other scavenging wildlife including federally endangered California condors as well as bald and golden eagles, crows, bears, cougars, and coyotes.

How can you protect wildlife while still meeting your obligations and responsibilities as a veterinarian?

The following guidelines can help:

Whose responsibility is it to ensure proper and safe disposal of euthanized animals?

The animal's owner is the responsible party. However, veterinarians may also be held liable if the owner does not dispose of the body in a proper or timely manner. Veterinarians also have a professional responsibility to educate clients who may not be aware of hazards associated with improper carcass disposal. Some cases appear to be caused by poor communication between the veterinarian and client, so clear and specific communication regarding this issue is essential!

How should an animal that has been euthanized with sodium pentobarbital be disposed of?

Ideally, the means of disposal should be identified before euthanasia to prevent prolonged storage and possible scavenging. Recommendations for carcass disposal include incineration and deep burial (please see links below for additional information). Carcasses should be buried at least three to four feet deep (or deeper if required by local regulations), and care should be taken to observe required distances from surface and groundwater.

Depending on the local soil type or presence of larger potential scavengers, such as bears, deeper burial may be necessary to prevent scavenging of euthanized animals. Some landfills accept carcasses, but please ensure that the landfill is burying the carcasses immediately upon delivery. Rendering of euthanized carcasses is not acceptable because rendering does not destroy drug residues and rendered material may be used for animal feed. For information on proper disposal of livestock, please contact the California Department of Food and Agriculture - Meat, Poultry and Egg Safety Branch at 916-9005004.

Conserving California's Wildlife Since 1870

Do these guidelines apply only to chemically-euthanized large animals, such as cows and horses?

No, proper care must also be exercised when disposing of all chemically-euthanized animals, including dogs, cats, goats, or poultry. Pets that have been chemically-euthanized can serve as a source of poisoning for wildlife (please see the references below for additional information). Veterinarians should inform clients who wish to retain their animal's remains about proper means of disposal, and the risk to wildlife if those methods are not employed. Of particular concern are recent reports of deceased pets being intentionally left to be scavenged as part of funeral rituals. In many cases, the euthanizing veterinarian will be the only avenue available for informing pet owners about the risks of these practices to wildlife.

Who do I inform if I have information about improper disposal of euthanized animals, and potential impacts on wildlife?

CDFW is actively investigating this issue and would be grateful for any information you can provide. Please contact Stella McMillin of the Wildlife Investigations Laboratory at 916-358-2954 or [stella.mcmillin\(a\)wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:stella.mcmillin(a)wildlife.ca.gov).

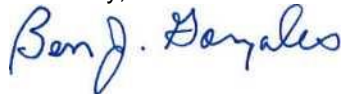
Where can I go for more information?

The American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines for Euthanasia of Animals (go to page 16): <https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Documents/euthanasia.pdf>

JAVMA News-2002-Euthanatized animals can poison wildlife: Veterinarians receive fines
<https://www.avma.org/News/JAVMANews/Pages/s011502d.aspx>

USFWS Fact Sheet: Secondary Pentobarbital Poisoning of Wildlife
<http://cpharm.vetmed.vt.edu/USFWS/USFWSFPentobarbFactSheet.pdf>

Sincerely,



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Thank you for doing your part to protect California's precious wildlife!